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## ON THE TEACHING OF CICERO<sup>1</sup>

BY GRANT SHOWERMAN  
The University of Wisconsin

Cicero is too much taken for granted. His facile language and comparatively easy subject-matter are responsible for a certain inclination to regard the presentation of his orations in the secondary school, and even his less well-known works in the college course, as involving no great difficulty. Judging from the programmes of classical conferences or the content of classical journals, one might easily be led to the conclusion that Cicero was of little importance compared with elementary Latin, about which everyone is writing, *indocti doctique*; or with Caesar, to whom we are told how to ascend by grades, or descend by inclines, or approach over broad avenues, and enter through enticing gateways—which somehow prove to be the same old strait and narrow ways leading to the usual needles' eyes; or with Latin composition, the main problem concerning which seems after all to be how to communicate a mastery of it without either devoting time to it or feeling an interest in it; or with Virgil, whose strain is beginning to induce a melancholy not wholly poetic in those who have set out to listen to the doctors in the temple in the hope of learning the nature of Latin stress—whether it was quantitative, or accentual, or accentually quantitative, or quantitatively accentual.

There may, indeed, be no special pedagogical questions connected with Cicero to be a smoke in the nose and a fire that burneth all the day. His is a universal interest, rather than a particular. Of all the authors of Latin antiquity whose works have survived, none is so important as he. To ground this assertion on his fame as the greatest prose stylist of the ages would be far from impossible; but my reasons are rather to be found in two other facts. These are: first, that Cicero is a representative figure in the most important century of Roman history; and second, that his personality appears in his page as that of no other individual of antiquity.

<sup>1</sup> Read at the meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, Nashville, April 18, 1908.

*Earum, si placet, causarum quanta quamque sit iusta una quaeque, videamus.* First, such was the length and breadth and depth of Cicero's experience that he may be called an epitome of his time: he is Roman by assimilation, southern Italian by birth; urban by experience, provincial in origin; of equestrian birth and affiliation, but risen to the patrician rank; of a stock representing the tastes and traditions of the good old days of the earlier Republic, and sent into this breathing world in a time which was out of joint, when everything old was being replaced, often with violence, by the new; of education embracing the simple training of a provincial father, the best instruction, public and private, available at the capital from masters both Roman and Greek, the most brilliant preceptorship in Greece and Asia, the broadening influence of travel, and humanizing contact with all the *artes liberales* of his time; a student not only in early years of necessity, but all his life by inclination; essayist, philosopher, and critic; orator, advocate, jurisconsult, and statesman; a soldier in youth, and again in middle age; an efficient provincial governor; incumbent of all the civil offices in the gift of the state, and member of the college of augurs; an associate on intimate terms with most of the great public figures of his time, and a congenial companion of many of the most important private characters; of long and eventful career. Few men were so intimately associated with every political movement; not even the masterful Caesar lived so long or so much. Cicero touched the life of his age at every point. His character and experience afford a compendium of the civilization of the last century of the Republic; he is a lens which focuses and transmits to us the scattered rays of his time.

He might, however, have been ever so much a type, compendium, or epitome, without being of especial importance to our own age. Many of his contemporaries also lived *multum et diu*—*vixere fortes ante Agamemnona*—but lacked the sacred bard. Cicero is unique. He is a personality with whom we may become intimately acquainted. No one of modern times is to be compared with him in this respect, for subsequent letter-writers, profiting by his example, have been careful to set down somewhat less than everything about themselves; and Horace alone of antiquity; and Horace's life is narrow when measured by that of Cicero. Cicero paints his own portrait with his own pen; or rather paints his own portrait into a larger painting of his own time—

a painting which for vividness and truth is unequaled; which is more vivid because it is the setting for his portrait, and the more truthful because it is to a great degree unconscious. Cicero's most pronounced weakness itself contributed to the sincerity of his picture. He has no secrets from us; for our regret that we cannot give him our unreserved sympathy and admiration we are more than compensated by the result of his unlimited frankness: his whole life is exposed to our gaze:

votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella.

And this fact, I may remind you, is of vastly more consequence in our study of an ancient, than in our study of a modern, author. We may read and enjoy and profit by a Tennyson or a Thackeray, or even an Addison or a Shakespeare, without an intimate study of the circumstances of their lives and times. We know so well the language and the civilization which they represent—are so familiar with its manner of dress, thought, social and political life, and achievement—that we feel no special call to study English civilization in order to appreciate their literature. The same is true to a somewhat lesser extent of the literatures of modern foreign nations. We interpret an author by our knowledge of the times in which he lives.

In the case of antiquity, on the contrary, the process is reversed. We interpret ancient civilization best through acquaintance with ancient individuals. Thorough intimacy with a Cicero will do more for our real appreciation of the life of twenty centuries ago than all the manuals on ancient life ever written. Latin antiquity is a land to travel in; those who tour it are abroad both in space and in time, and are privileged to receive twofold benefit from their peregrinations. During our sojourn in its realms we do well to take the author of the orations and letters as our *cicerone*; for there is no other guide in the length and breadth of the Latin classics who is so rich in knowledge and experience, so communicative, and so much like ourselves, as Rome's least mortal mind.

In thus dwelling upon the underlying causes of Cicero's importance I have also suggested the main causes of our more or less unconscious tendency to minimize his importance, and have been paving my way toward the recommendations regarding the teaching of Cicero which form the real subject-matter of my paper.

Of such recommendations I present only two. The first is: *Know more.*

In enumerating some of the requisites entering into the equipment of the ideal instructor in Cicero, I would set down, first of all, absolute mastery of the machinery of the Latin language. This may seem gratuitous, but when I call to mind the atrocities of which seniors in college who intend to teach are guilty, I am driven to wonder whether eight years behind the teacher's desk serve to accomplish what eight years in front of it so wretchedly fail to do. Little wonder if the study of Latin composition is a deadly bore to all concerned, when the person who conducts it is so lame in vocabulary, forms, and syntax that he dares not remove his eye from the pages of his textbook.

In the second place I may mention—again carrying logs into the forest—an appreciation of the literary excellences of Cicero's language—its fulness, its balance, its absolute ease, its perspicuity. There are too many mere mechanics teaching Latin as well as other literary subjects. A teacher may be a graduate of the most famed university in the land, may possess its highest degree, may have reprints of his learned articles on all our shelves and be the envied recipient of numerous calls to "more lucrative positions," and still be incapable of treating a Latin author as literature because his own nature is thoroughly wooden and pedestrian. It is possible to be a humanist of great reputation without being human. The flower of the plant we call language is the literary art: many who can give you the analysis of the soil, and can diagram the relation of root and branch to each other and to the trunk, are unable to distinguish the beautiful colors of the blossom, and never suspect its exquisite aroma.

My next suggestion is familiarity with a group of subjects historical in nature: first, Roman history in general; second, Roman political institutions, or constitutional history; third, the history of Cicero's own time; fourth, the history of Cicero's own life. The conspiracy of Catiline, the civil wars, and the proscription are not isolated facts: to appreciate their significance one must know the workings of the spirit of democracy throughout the earlier centuries of Rome's existence—the everlasting strife between it and oligarchy, and the various issues in which the conflict was manifest at various times—and realize that the story of Rome is a great example of the truth that "the

history of mankind is the history of the struggle for liberty." If Cicero's rise to power, his downfall and exile, his relations with Caesar, and his struggle with Antony are to be understood—and all of these are necessary to the proper comprehension of his works, especially of the orations—some familiarity with constitutional as well as political history is indispensable. The ability to repeat glibly that Cicero was born in 106, held the consulship in 63, was exiled in 58, etc., etc., does not necessarily indicate a knowledge of Cicero's life and times. Every event in his life should, indeed, be known; but dates, names, and events are barren without an intimate acquaintance with Cicero himself—his appearance, aspirations, regrets, hopes, fears, tastes, peculiarities, family and social relations—such knowledge as might come from real association with a man, and is to be gotten in Cicero's case principally from the letters.

As a fourth requisite, I urge an acquaintance with a group of subjects more or less intimately connected with all study of Latin literature. I mean such subjects as archaeology, art, life, and religion. One book on each of these subjects should be at the elbow of every teacher of Latin. If one is to visualize the man Cicero—his person, his dress, the scenes among which he walked, the objects which he admired, the men whose emotions he sought to arouse—something more than a superficial acquaintance with the ancient city and its life is desirable.

Again, learn Italian. Its illumination of Latin is as great as the profit and enjoyment it yields in itself. The teacher who can speak even a few words of Italian and read the Italian classics looks with new eyes upon the peculiarities of elision, quantity, doubled consonants, and scansion, as well as literary content and spirit. Greek is, indeed, of prime importance to us as the literary fountain of Latin writers: we take it for granted as an indispensable part of the Latin teacher's qualifications; but it should be supplemented by Italian, for the reasons above stated, and for the additional reason that it will make apparent the fallacy of treating Roman literature as if it were a reflection or a copy or a mere adaptation of Greek literature. Roman literature is an Italian literature. It is indwelt by a spirit of its own even where its content is most Greek. If it is not possessed of originality, then neither are Dante, Tasso, Ariosto,

or Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer to be classed among creative artists.

My last recommendation is like unto its immediate predecessor. I would have the teacher of Cicero spend a season in Italy. The floods of light thrown on ancient literature and civilization by a sojourn among the scenes and people of modern Italy afford an inspiration which insures life-long enthusiasm to the classical teacher. If an "aspiration is a joy forever, a possession as solid as a landed estate, a fortune which we can never exhaust, and which gives us year by year a revenue of pleasurable activity," the way to riches lies open to us; for the spell of Italy means increased interest in all the products of culture for all the years to come.

You see that what the qualifications as above outlined amount to is familiarity with ancient Roman civilization in general, and with its literature in particular. Breadth of background, fulness of knowledge, richness of intellectual experience, depth of interest—the possessor of these will be rich not only in knowledge, but in the enthusiasm without which the teacher's life stagnates. He will be prepared to teach not only Cicero, but other Latin subjects—and teach them sympathetically. Cicero may not inspire love in us to the extent that Virgil and Horace do; but that rank distaste which many conceive for him is due to one-sided knowledge—or let us be frank and say to ignorance. Those who know his whole career entertain different sentiments toward him.

But I must pause to answer the protests which are rising in your minds. How is the prospective teacher to master all these subjects during a college course? And if he cannot do so then, how is he to do it when teaching five or six periods per day in a secondary school, or even three in a college or university? And how is one to go abroad on a classical teacher's salary? Or even to buy a small reference library? And even were a teacher to become as learned as he would, how could he teach the sum of his knowledge in the short periods given to recitations, which do not suffice for even the elements of his subject? And if he had never so much time, what use in presenting all this learning before pupils of immature years with no powers of appreciation?

I hasten to set myself right, if that be possible. The college course

is a beginning, not an end, of preparation. Life is long, and the excellent teacher is a development. Breadth and depth of knowledge and thorough command of subject are acquired only through prolonged experience, noble discontent, and unceasing aspiration. To keep on growing in skill and equipment is the indispensable thing.

But neither growth nor inspiration will long continue if the professional tools are not kept bright and sharp, and the hand constantly trained to greater skill in their use. The instruments of the teacher are books. One book each on the subjects above suggested would constitute a library on Cicero which would also serve for all the subjects taught by the teacher of Cicero. The total cost of an equipment covering these subjects might be fifteen dollars; yet how many there are whose libraries contain little else than the textbooks presented by generous publishers! A carpenter or a goldsmith would not think for a moment of doing without the tools of his trade, or of resting content with poor ones, or, least of all, with borrowed ones. No teacher who goes without books, or depends upon library books only, will ever master his subject. His occupation will sooner or later become the vilest of trades instead of the noblest of professions.

We need to adopt the professional attitude, or—to employ a phrase which expresses a fine philosophy of life—to play the game. When secondary-school teachers shall begin to spend longer time in preparation, and shall come to their work with at least a Master's degree, when there shall be some assurance that they will not throw up their situations in the middle of the year to get married or go into life insurance or law, when their Saturdays and Sundays are not spent in flying trips to their homes and the other five days in longing expectation of Friday night and another opportunity to escape, when they identify themselves with the communities whence they derive their support, when they spend their spare cash and their spare moments, however little and however few, in acquiring more books and in gaining greater mastery over their subjects, when they begin to sacrifice the present to the future by going in debt, if necessary, for extended preparation or for a visit to Italy—perhaps school boards will themselves recognize their work as professional and reward them accordingly. No one of course can deny that present salaries are in general inadequate and unjust; but in many cases they are no more than



earned, and perhaps our employers are awaiting greater proof of their guilt. Teachers must remember that in the business world the demonstration of merit usually precedes the reward of merit. We all need more of the spirit of the office boy, who when asked by his employer whether he thought he deserved a raise of salary, replied yes, he had thought so for some time, but had been so blamed busy that he hadn't had time to call the firm's attention to it.

But now that I have insisted on thorough preparation and continued growth, let me bind up my second suggestion with my first, and present you my complete text in a paradox: *Know more and teach less*. It is neither Roman religion, nor Roman life, nor Roman archaeology, nor history, nor the life of Cicero, nor constitutional history, nor yet literary history, which you are employed to teach. These are only accessory. Your real effort must be to communicate a knowledge of the Latin language, of the literature of Cicero, and of the spirit of Roman civilization. The first is more or less mechanical—the memorizing of words, the mastery of forms and syntax, the translation of the ordinary Latin sentence with ease and accuracy, the realization that Latin is the greatest ancestor of English. The second is literary—the appreciation of artistic form and rich content and the manifestation of such appreciation by exact and tasteful rendering into English. The third is more spiritual—it comprehends the others, and includes further that genial understanding of a civilization foreign in space, race, and time which is so large an element in our appreciation of the significance of history and the meaning of life.

These are the prime objects in the teaching of Cicero. It is to secure these in all their fulness that the instructor should be possessed of the equipment I have suggested. Not that he ought to give exhaustive accounts of the deep things of Roman archaeology and Roman history. No one whom much learning hath not made mad would think of lecturing to a Cicero class on constitutional antiquities or religion, and no one not so beside himself with excessive graduate study or "scholarly" contribution to learned classical journals as to have lost the power of estimating the interest and ability of high-school pupils would attempt to make these outlying fields of learning objects in themselves. You may know how to paint a cypress tree perfectly; but what of that, if your students are suffering shipwreck

of interest because you do not make antiquity and its language live for them? You may have spent last year in Rome, but your pupils will not see, so clearly as you think you do, the importance of knowing the exact measurements of the baths of Caracalla, or the various theories as to the orientation of the Curia under the Republic. You may be intensely interested in moods, tenses, sounds, and forms, but you will do better by the classics to omit fine-spun theories of the subjunctive in class and provide an outlet for your enthusiasm by contributing an article to the world's literature of humor as it appears in learned periodicals. What young people in the classics need is not so much learned disquisitions on the comparative merits of the claims of hen and egg to priority as intimate introduction to the real products. It is high time that instructors of both high-school and college students began to cultivate a realizing sense that young people of the narrow range of intellectual experience possessed by their pupils are not to be treated as incipient seminar students.

The skilful instructor will not come to class with learned notes—*doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis*—to be dragged in, dead and heavy, nor with his head crammed with erudition for use during that particular recitation, but will stimulate his students as occasion arises by illuminating though unpretentious comment which flows without effort and spontaneously from a mind richly stored with well-digested knowledge. He will be an interpreter of Cicero and his civilization, a mediator between ancient and modern times. The glory of his teaching will be not only that he secures mechanical results, but spiritual—not only the mastery of a language, but the appreciative condition of mind which we call understanding, and without which the student may hardly be said to have acquired culture, however great the number of facts at his command.

To conclude, I mean by my paradox that what the teacher of Cicero most needs is: first, more background, to enable him to appreciate thoroughly the peculiar qualities and the great importance of his author; and second, balance sufficient to insure his recognition of the relative importance of foreground and background in his instruction. I am quite aware that I have omitted to give you a proper number of "don't's," have not discussed the vexed question of the teaching of composition in connection with Cicero, have recommended no list

of orations and letters, and have otherwise come short of the glory within the grasp of those fortunate enough to be on this programme; but I have often felt that so much energy is wasted in the attempt to determine what shall be the content of courses, and what the method of conducting them, that no strength is left for the actual operation of instruction; and so an exhortation to general excellence seemed to me timely.